DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 897 IR 007 965

AUTHOR Feilitzen, Cecilia
TITLE Maternal Observations of Child Behaviours in the Course of Home Televiewing: A Method for Studying Small Children's Preferences for and Reactions to TV Programmes. Summary of the Method Used in Six Studies of Children.
INSTITUTION Swedish Broadcasting Corp., Stockholm.
PUB DATE 21 Sep 72
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Television; *Interest Research; Interest Scales; *Observation; Preschool Children; Research Methodology; *Television Research
IDENTIFIERS Sweden

ABSTRACT

The findings of six studies based on in-home observations of children's television viewing behavior as recorded by mothers, fathers, or other adults caring for the child are summarized and compared. The object of this research method is to determine child interest in the programs, the variability of interest within programs, the amount of series interest in relation to the number of programs, the amount of viewer interest, questioning behavior, and the type of questions raised. This procedure, which has proven useful for children aged three to seven, has been used in samples varying from 150 to 600 subjects. A discussion of the generalizability, reliability, and validity of the results obtained with this method concludes the report. (RAO)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

SVERIGES RADIO
Audience and Programme Research Department
CvF/GW
1972-09-21

R

ED181897

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Bjorn Hoijer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

MATERNAL OBSERVATIONS OF CHILD BEHAVIOURS IN THE COURSE OF HOME TELEVIEWING -

a method for studying small children's preferences for and reactions to TV programmes

Summary of the method used in six studies of children

Cecilia v Feilitzen

IR007965

A large number of methodological problems arise when one wants to do research that is meant to produce reliable and valid findings respecting small children´s preferences for and reactions to TV programmes. Different types of questions put to the children are often inapplicable, since younger children are emotional, subjective and inconsistent when they express themselves - provided they can or want to express themselves in the first place. Questions that are addressed to their mothers (or other adults) can also impair validity: more or less unconsciously, the mother tends to indicate such preferences, for instance, which she herself thinks the child ought to have.

One method that has proved to be relatively meaningful for present purposes is to observe the "outward", actual behaviours of the children in connection with viewing and/or during a shorter time period after viewing. However, one drawback of this method is the difficulty of finding valid "translations" of the observed behaviours into preferences and reactions of the child. Another difficulty is to avoid the influence over child behaviour that comes from the presence of the observer. One-way screen, video-recording or similar techniques can be used. Then, however, practical and economic reasons will make it necessary to conduct the observations in a laboratory/viewing room (where the children watch under atypical conditions) or at certain institutions such as day nurseries/kindergartens (where the children watch the programmes in groups). The most common viewer situation for pre-school children in Sweden is to watch TV programmes in the home setting.

Observations by mothers

British research has shown, however, that even if mothers tend to be subjective when they rate their children´s attitudes to TV programmes, they can reliably and "objectively" observe their children´s actual behaviours in the televiewing situation: A high degree of congruence was found between mothers when they described the quantity and type of such behaviours and these could be classified into six clearly marked-off types of emotional reactions. An index was devised with which the mothers could note their observations of child-viewer behaviours in terms of interest and enjoyment. [1]

This index, which may accordingly be said to measure the interest of younger children in TV programmes, was translated into Swedish and used at SR/PUB (the Audience and Programme Research Department of Sveriges Radio) in a questionnaire survey, where the mother (, the father or another adult who takes care of the child) was asked to note that behaviour which was mostly displayed by the child when it watched six different programme series for juniors and adults. [2] The index differentiated well between the

---

1) Programme Assessment Limited: Developmental Research Prior to Setting up a Television Viewers´ Panel. Ref. No: PAL - 6711/7002. 1967.

2) Cecilia v Feilitzen, Olga Linné: Living Habits and Broadcasting Media Behaviour of 3-6 Year-Olds. SR/PUB, no. 7/68. Stockholm, 1969.

programmes. It contains the following categories:

The child is: totally uninterested - aware but not very interested - fully interested - excited - excited to the pitch of fear - very amused indeed

In-home observations by mothers

In order to obtain a more modified measure of child reactions to TV programmes and also of reactions under viewing conditions as normal as possible, the work group for child research at SR/PUB devised the following method:

The mothers (, the fathers or other adults who take care of the child) are asked to observe the viewing behaviours of the children while exposed to regular telecasts in the home, and to record the interest in the programme - according to the index described above - at different intervals in the course of the programme. In addition, the mothers are asked to write down all questions and spontaneous comments coming from the children while they are watching, even if these questions and comments are unrelated to the programme itself.

The object of this research method is to try to find answers to questions such as the following:

How interested are the children in the programme?
How does the interest vary in the course of the programme/with different parts of the programme?
Does the interest in a programme series rise or fall with an increased number of programmes?
How long are small children capable of interesting themselves in a programme?
Does the programme/do special programme features give rise to any questions and comments from the children while they are watching?
What type of questions and comments does the programme give rise to?

Research studies at SR/PUB

The research method has so far been tried out and used in six different studies with respect to a total of sixteen children's programmes. [1]

---

1) Leni Filipson, Ingela Schyller: Investigation of Two Children's Programmes in the Series, "Now We Are Going to Look at...". SR/PUB no. 101/69, Stockholm 1970.

Mothers recorded observations for two programmes in the series, "Now We Are Going to Look at...", produced especially for children aged 3-4. The programmes deal with different animals (the pig and the sheep respectively) and are of an informative character. Programme length, 12-15 minutes.

(continued)

When the observation schedule was tried out, it was deemed feasible to let the mothers observe the children's behaviours every 2½ minutes. These intervals are suitable when the investigator himself has not had access to the programme prior to the observations. In those studies where the investigator has been enabled to watch and analyze the programme in advance, the regular time intervals have been exchanged for each marked-off part of the programme (104/71, 194/71).

Other findings that emerged from the tryout procedure were: the interest index did not differentiate so well between different programmes for preschool children as between programmes for children and adults; for purposes of recording observations for programmes for preschool children, the mothers wanted an additional category in the index ("fairly interested"); and, in recording observations for these programmes, the mothers made use of certain categories in the index to a very low extent.

(continued)

Leni Filipson, Ingela Schyller: Pretest of Two Programmes in the Series, "People". SR/PUB no. 162/69, Stockholm 1970.

Mothers recorded observations for one programme in the series, "People", which deals with various functions of the human body. The programmes are produced for children in the 4-7 age range and are of an informative character. Programme length, about 12 minutes.

Leni Filipson, Ingela Schyller, Göte Hansson: Children's Reactions to Some Non-conventional Programmes for Children ("Pictures and Sounds"). SR/PUB no. 58/70, Stockholm 1970.

Mothers recorded observations for five programmes in the series, "Pictures and Sounds", produced especially for children aged 4-7. The programmes are of a cultural and non-conventional character - building in large part upon nonfigurative and unfamiliar sound compositions and illustrations. Programme length, about 15 minutes.

Leni Filipson, Ingela Schyller: Do You Want to Know? Interest of 3-6 Year-Olds in a Series of Programmes for Children. SR/PUB no. 243/70, Stockholm 1971.

Mothers recorded observations for three programmes in the series, "Do You Want to Know?", produced especially for children aged 3-6. Though mainly of an informative character, the programmes also contain amusing features. The subjects considered are: the cow, the tree, and how a child is born. Programme length, 20-25 minutes.

To obtain comparative data, mothers also recorded observations for one programme in the series, "Pippi Long-stocking". This programme is of an entertaining character. Programme length, somewhat more than 20 minutes.

Gunilla Preisler: Interest of 5-6 Year-Olds in Two Programmes from the TRU Series of Programmes for Children, "About". SR/PUB no. 104/71, Stockholm 1972.

(continued)

Since this type of studies in the first place were to be concerned with programmes for preschool children, the index was revised into the following categories:

The child is: totally uninterested - aware but not very interested - fairly interested - fully interested - excited (, very amused indeed).

The revised index has been used in all six studies, since the primary object has been to obtain a data base for comparisons between studied programmes. - In order to get some form of comparison measure at the beginning of these studies, the mothers used the same index to tell how the child usually behaved in the presence of a well-known programme for children (101/69).

Observation schedules have been sent off together with letters of introduction and return envelopes to the parents some days before the programme is to be broadcast.

Representative samples have been drawn for each programme's target group; all in all, the method has been used and proved useful for children from 3 to 7 years of age. In the case of one programme, which was especially aimed at very small children, observation schedules were also sent to the parents of 2-year-olds on a trial basis; here, however, the response frequency turned out to be much lower than for other ages (101/69). Earlier research findings also have shown that the majority of preschool children do not begin to watch TV a little more attentively until the age of three.

The sample size has varied between 150 and 600 children. Most often observations have been returned for about half of the children, though in one study the proportion was about one-third. However, the programmes in the last-mentioned study had gone out at a less convenient broadcast time, a fact which those parents who returned questionnaires but who had not seen the programme also stated as the main reason for non-viewing. In some studies the parents thus have been asked to return the questionnaires even if they have not made observations of the children. In cases where these requests were combined with a reminder letter, the response percentage on these occasions went up by nearly one-third of the total sample (104/71, 194/71).

On some occasions the same sample was used in more than one mailing of observation schedules. The number of participants was then about one-third less as regards the second programme than as regards the first one.

(continued)

Mothers recorded observations for two programmes in the series, "About", produced especially for 5-6 year-olds. The programmes deal with milk and with natural sounds; the object is to inform and activate. Programme length, 20 minutes.

Gunilla Preisler: Interest of Children in Two Programmes from the TRU Series, "About", Investigated Regionally via Sundsvall. SR/PUB no. 194/71, Stockholm 1972.

Mothers recorded observations for two programmes from the same series as in project no. 104/71. One programme deals with expecting a brother/sister, the other with soap and lather.

Some general results

The responses to a direct question put to the mothers indicate that, on an average, the children´s interest varies in a fairly high degree with different programmes for small children (101/69).

The results yielded by the six studies in which mothers recorded their observations show that the interest of preschool children can vary strongly from one programme to another. The most common result has been that the average interest in a programme for preschool children lies between "fairly interested" and "fully interested". The highest value that has been measured so far for a programme is that the interest on an average is somewhat higher than "fully interested". The lowest value measured for a programme is that the children was "fairly interested" when the programme started, but that the interest kept declining steadily thereafter so that about half the children were "totally uninterested" by the time the programme ended.

Variations of interest in different programme features are easier to read off when the parents observe the children per part than when they observe at regular time intervals.

The children´s questions and spontaneous comments have yielded valuable qualitative information about their reactions to the programme.

Relatively few children keep quiet throughout the programme (when they show interest in it) and a very small percentage of their remarks has to do with matters which bear no relation to the programme.

The questions and comments (which are usually descriptive or evaluative) have provided indications about such things as wonder, interest, involvement, activation, frustration, annoyance and fear with respect to the child, and this holds true both for the programme as a whole and for different programme features.

Observation schedule in combination with other methods

The observation schedule may of course be combined with other research methods.

In the six studies the questionnaire technique has been used to ascertain the opinions of the mothers on the programme suitability, the programme length, the programme participants, suitable transmission times and the like, and in addition to find out about the child in terms of its viewing habits, exposure to certain programmes, receiver situation as well as about som more conventional background variables.

Further, attempts have been made to measure the effects of the studied programme:

The mothers have been asked in questionnaires whether the child has responded to cues coming from the programme leader and whether the child has talked about anything in the programme/

done anything which might be considered as influenced by the programme content, later in the day or on the day after the programme was seen (101/69, 104/71, 194/71).

Also, the mothers have been asked to administer an oral knowledge and comprehension test with illustrations to the children. The questions were to be put on the day preceding the programme (or not later than a couple of hours ahead) and directly after the programme (or not later than bedtime on the same day) (101/69).

Generalizability, reliability and validity of the results

The results obtained with the described observation method cannot be considered representative of all children in the ages investigated - since the size of nonresponse tends to be about half the children in the sample. However, the percentage of participants agrees with that which is customarily obtained when persons are invited to watch TV in a viewing room. The results may also be regarded as representative of much larger groups of children compared with, for instance, observations of a group in a day nursery.

In one of the six studies, nonresponse was followed up by means of telephone interviews to find out whether the non-responders differed from the persons participating in the study (243/70). The principal object was to identify, if there were any differences regarding the viewing habits of the children and the attitudes of the mothers to children's televiewing. The follow-up showed that the non-respondents were almost identical in these respects with the participating persons.

Nor can the results be considered representative for those children who make up the actual programme audience - since the parents are asked in advance to watch the programme together with the children. However, the child audience under maternal observation probably agrees better with the actual child audience than, for example, a child audience invited to watch in a viewing room, as the first-mentioned group watches during the regular transmission time.

Very few frequency studies of preschooler televiewing have been carried out; to judge from the data available, the number of children who have watched in connection with maternal observation seems to be 10-30 percent more than the number who have spontaneously watched similar programmes broadcast at the same times.

As to the reliability and validity of the results, the following points, among others, should be emphasized:

Even though the viewing situation under maternal observation is more normal compared with having the children watch in groups at an institution or after invitation to a viewing room, the situation still does not match the usual one: In the first place, not all children are in the habit of watching programmes for children in the company of their parents; many ordinarily watch together with siblings (/playmates) or by themselves. In the second place, the parental role of observer may affect the be-

haviours of the children. Research findings also suggest that observations made by strangers in certain situations may cause less interaction between observer and child than observations made by adults whom the child knows. It is doubtful, however, whether this finding hold for the situation of watching TV in the home.

Further, the index used has not been thoroughly tried out for Swedish conditions. The new category, "fairly interested", has not been examined more closely, either. The question remains if the mothers really are able to discern behaviours in their children which correspond to this category or if it rather gives the mothers the opportunity to make subjective ratings or their children's interest.

A comparison between two types of observations was made for one programme (194/71), which sheds some light on the reliability and validity aspects. In line with the one method, the mothers observed children in the home by means of the interest index during each marked-off part of the programme. In line with the other method, children were observed (through videorecording) in groups at preschools and trained observers judged the children's viewer behaviour (did the child watch or not) during each one-minute interval of the programme. The latter method can sooner be regarded as giving some idea of the children's attentiveness to the programme.

The results showed that both the interest and the attentiveness declined with the same part of the programme but that the decline in interest (according to the parental observations) was stronger. The latter finding could be attributed to various causes: for instance, the child behaves differently at home than in a preschool group; different types of children were being observed; or the parents and the trained observers differ from each other in their judgings. Another plausible interpretation is that the interest and the attentiveness are not quite comparable, since the former measure builds upon several different types of behaviours while the latter is based on only one behavioural type.

Further, "fully interested" appeared to correspond to high attentiveness, in other words, the child watches the programme all along during a certain judging interval. There was one exception, however: When the programme began the parental observations stated an interest slightly above "fairly interested", whereas the children who watched in groups were 100-percent attentive.

A closer analysis of the six studies reveals that practically all programmes which were investigated by means of parental observations received, on an average, an interest that was "fairly great" at the beginning. Any tendency that the attentiveness would be more or less high as the very beginning of a programme has not been noticed from observations of the above-mentioned type performed at preschools.

The reason for the fairly great interest can perhaps be traced to uncertainty in parental judgings at the beginning of a programme; attentiveness (based on only one behavioural type) may be easier to determine. (As mentioned earlier, the category "fairly interested" might also give vent to subjectivity in the judgings.) Another possible explanation is that the children watch the programmes at home on a definite transmission time - no consideration is paid to whether or not the child has had time to concentrate on the programme. But since the parents are asked in advance to follow the programme and it may be assumed that they have prepared the child, this explanation is maybe less plausible. It could just as well be argued that the preparations have implanted high expectations in the child which the beginning of the programme does not fulfil.

As to the children at preschools, they have been permitted to sit down in front of the TV set in relative peace and quiet, and no programme showing has begun until everyone is assembled. The adults have then left the playroom and the children have watched the programme by themselves.

Summing up, one can say that, except for the beginning of the programme, the results obtained with the two methods show a relatively good congruence.

Concluding remarks

In view of the results that have appeared to date, maternal observations of child behaviours in the course of home televiewing appear as a relatively meaningful method of measuring small children's preferences for and reactions to TV programmes - provided that the method suits the aim of the research project. (Given the present TV system it cannot be used to pretest programmes, for example.) The foregoing discourse points to some important aspects that should be subjected to further, systematic evaluation. The method is by no means unassailable, but it should be seen in relation to the pros and cons of other existing methods.